

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
February 9-10, 2013
Hebrews 3:1-6

“Who Is My Neighbor? – God’s House in the Serving Community”

Our 5-week focus in this Epiphany season, **Being SJLC 2013 (Serving Jesus – Living in Community)**, comes to a close on this Festival of the Transfiguration. Today we travel with Peter, James and John to the mountain top and view that amazing sight of Jesus’ transfiguration; how his appearance and clothing became dazzling and blindingly bright like the sun. Flanked by Moses and Elijah, those towering figures from the Old Testament who represent the Law and the Prophets, the Father’s voice is heard again as it was at Jesus’ baptism: **“This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him”** (Luke 9:35). Jesus stands between Moses and Elijah because it is in Jesus, true God and true man, that the demands of the Law and the promises of the Prophets are all fulfilled. As we consider Jesus’ transfiguration and what this means for our life in Christ, the message for this day rises up out of that appointed Epistle lesson, and is entitled **“God’s House in the Serving Community.”** May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

When we think of God’s house, what probably comes to mind is a structure like this sanctuary – a place dedicated and set aside for the worship and praise of the Lord. The people of Jesus’ day thought the same thing of the temple in Jerusalem. It was the place where God dwelt - God’s house, they believed. But Jesus’ coming changed that. Think back to Christmas and the words of John 1: **“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14). That little word “dwelt” means to pitch a tent, to take up temporary dwelling place. In the days before the temple in Jerusalem, there was the tabernacle – a movable tent in which God dwelt among his people. God’s presence was not in some stationary, fixed location, but in this mobile unit that was the tabernacle (see Exodus 40). Jesus came to be the new tabernacle where God’s saving presence is found. In Jesus, God’s house is no longer a place, but a Person. Through his birth, his life of service and ministry, his transfiguration on the mountain top, his innocent suffering and death, his glorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus pitched his tent among us and tabernacled here in the midst of our broken world. Jesus affirmed this when he said, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again”** (John 2:19). The temple Jesus was speaking of was his body. If we want to see and know God’s presence, then we need look no further than Jesus. Where He is, there is God’s house.

As we look at today’s Epistle reading, note what is said here: **“... consider Jesus, the *apostle* and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house”** (Hebrews 3:1b-2). Jesus as apostle? Nowhere else in the New Testament is the Lord Jesus called an apostle – only here. At first glance, this seems very strange because Jesus is the One who calls apostles (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13). What’s up with this? The original word here in the New Testament for apostle literally means one who is sent, and that is who Jesus is: the high priest who was sent by the Father into our sinful and broken world to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Apostles are sent to preach and proclaim while high priests offer sacrifice. Jesus is both, and this is why he stands in transfigured glory between Moses and Elijah on that mountain top. He is the One who fulfills all

righteousness by proclaiming the good news of the forgiveness of sins that comes through his sacrificial death upon the cross.

There is this comparison going on in the Epistle lesson between Jesus and Moses, as we read: **“Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son”** (Hebrews 3:5-6a). God’s house here can certainly mean a literal house (e.g., God’s tabernacle), but I think the better meaning here is God’s household – his chosen people. Called and appointed by God, Moses exercised faithful stewardship in his generation in the household of the Lord (see Numbers 12:7). But Moses was flesh and blood like us, and like us, only a servant. Jesus is the Son of God. Note the spatial terminology that is used here: **“Now Moses was faithful *in* all God’s house as a servant... , but Christ is faithful *over* God’s house as a son”** (Hebrews 3:5a, 6a). A servant can only serve *in* the house, but the Son has power and authority *over* the house. Jesus the transfigured Son of God was appointed to a position of leadership, as was Moses. Jesus the transfigured Son of God was faithful in the exercise of that leadership, as was Moses. Jesus the transfigured Son of God is worthy of more glory than Moses precisely because he is the Son and not the servant as was Moses. And the house over which Jesus has power and authority is the household of faith of which you and I, by the grace of God, are members.

My friends, look at how today’s Epistle lesson ends: **“And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope”** (Hebrews 3:6b). The house of the Lord remains not a place, but a person – it’s each one of us and all of us who been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection, who trust in him for the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. But we say: “My house is filthy and unfit. It’s not worthy of the Lord.” But what the Lord has cleansed through his precious blood, we must not call unclean. We are the house of the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17)! As Jesus was sent from the Father, so he now send us, his mobile ministry units, out into the world in the power and strength of his Name (Matthew 28:16-20 and John 20:21) to love and serve our neighbor in his Name. The transfigured Lord Jesus Christ who is our Apostle and High Priest calls us to be his sent ones in the world that is all around us. As we get in our cars and leave this place, take a good look at the signs posted at the exit of the church parking lot: “You Are Now Entering the Mission Field.” **Being SJLC 2013** really does not end today; rather, it is up to us as the household of faith to carry this forward and live out in daily life the answer to that question: “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). May God help each one of us to do this, for the glory and praise of the Lord and for the good of our neighbor. Amen.